

2002 SESSION REPORT

15TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

February 2002



REP. BARB LISK

401 Legislative Bldg.
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7874



**REP.
BRUCE CHANDLER**

402 Legislative Bldg.
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7960
e-mail:
chandler_br@leg.wa.gov

**Toll-free
Legislative Hotline:
1-800-562-6000**

Dear friends,

In a year normally set aside for mid-stream adjustments in policy and spending, lawmakers will be grappling with enormous challenges during the 2002 legislative session. We will be looking for ways to stimulate our economy and put families back to work. We hope to address the critical needs of our state's transportation system. And we must bring our \$22.8 billion state operating budget back into balance.

A special election held in November for a legislative seat in Snohomish County has given Democrats control of both the House and Senate, along with the governor's office. Even though the power-sharing tie in the House is history, we expect it still will take a significant amount of bipartisanship to get anything accomplished.

Our priority this session will be to ensure the Legislature's actions are responsible and fair for all of Washington. We need to develop policies to attract good-paying jobs to our communities, bring government spending under control, and prevent needless tax increases from burdening working families.

This newsletter outlines some of the key issues we'll be addressing this session. If you have questions or thoughts on these or other issues, we hope you'll take the time to contact us. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barb Lisk".

Barb Lisk
State Representative

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bruce Chandler".

Bruce Chandler
State Representative



THE 2002 LEGISLATIVE SESSION: STAY INFORMED!

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BALANCING THE BUDGET

With the recession taking its toll on state revenues, we currently face a \$1.2 billion shortfall in the state operating budget. As we address this budget challenge, lawmakers must remember that Washington families are also facing challenges. It would be easy to balance the budget simply by raising taxes. However, we should not demand that families pay more when many are facing the loss of their own income.

GOVERNOR'S BUDGET PROTECTS BUREAUCRACY INSTEAD OF VULNERABLE CITIZENS

The first plan to correct the budget shortfall was offered by the governor in December. It calls for cuts to disabled citizens, nursing homes, and pharmacists who provide prescription drugs to low-income citizens on Medicaid. Despite the governor's assurance that he wouldn't increase taxes, his proposal would raise taxes by \$100 million.

Even more discouraging is what the governor's proposal doesn't do: It fails to make a serious attempt to reduce state bureaucracy. It calls for a net reduction of just 355 staff (less than one half of 1 percent of the 99,300 full-time staff).

In our opinion, the governor's approach is backwards. We should be looking for ways to cut bureaucracy with the least impact on front-line services for those truly in need. Instead, the governor's plan protects state-paid mid-level management jobs at the expense of the most vulnerable members of our community.

We will be looking for a more reasonable approach as lawmakers work through this budget in the coming months. The state should do what working families do when they fall on tough times – establish priorities, control spending and pay for essential needs.

The bottom line is the governor's budget plan still spends over a billion dollars more than the state will receive in revenue this biennium. If we want to correct this problem, there's simply no substitute for living within our means.



GOVERNOR'S BUDGET PROPOSAL

An Overview

Total Revenues:	\$21.374 billion
Total Expenditures:	\$22.530 billion
Difference:	-\$1.156 billion
Ending fund balance:	\$0

Emergency

Reserves balance: **\$303 million**

Governor's proposed budget cuts:

- \$35 million from nursing homes
- \$54 million from higher education
- \$34 million from Medicaid reimbursements for prescription drugs
- \$31 million from state assistance for the disabled
- \$14 million in block grants to K-12 schools

Governor's proposed tax increases:

- 3% liquor tax - \$4.7 million
- 10% gambling tax - \$73.7 million
- Use tax on shipping - \$20 million
- Hydraulic project fees - \$4.3 million
- Hunting and fishing license increase - \$1 million

Representative Lisk watches debate during floor action in the House of Representatives.

PROVIDING JOBS FOR WASHINGTON FAMILIES GIVE AGRICULTURE THE HELP IT DESERVES

Communities across Washington are being reminded what it's like to go through a recession, after years of economic prosperity. They are experiencing now what farming communities in Central Washington have struggled through for several years. Many are realizing the toll of excessive government regulations thrust upon large and small businesses by aggressive state agencies.

In December, Gov. Locke's press office announced that his 1997 executive order to eliminate unnecessary regulations had led to the repeal of more than 8,000 agency rules. The Washington State Register shows 5,455 agency rules were repealed between the second quarter of 1999 and the third quarter of 2001. Amazingly, during this same time, 24,003 new permanent rules were adopted. In other words, for every rule that the governor's agencies have repealed, more than four new rules have been adopted.



Unfortunately, recent remarks by the governor in Yakima tell us he fully intends to let the state's costly new ergonomics standards go into effect this year. Also, although a ruling last year invalidated part of the state's new shoreline regulations, we expect state regulators will again do their utmost to infringe on private property rights. Any of these would be enough of a burden on growers and processors; together they will be devastating to our local economy, which depends heavily on our workforce and our land base.

Legislators throughout the state need to understand that agriculture is an essential industry, providing more jobs in Washington than any other industry. We should do everything possible to help reduce the regulatory costs for growers and processors.

Representative Chandler serves as assistant floor leader in the House of Representatives.

BUILD ON THE SUCCESSFUL CHANGES IN WATER MANAGEMENT

Last year's drought may have passed, but the need for water has not. Last year, we worked to successfully adopt significant water permitting legislation in an effort to speed up processing of permit applications and get water to where it is needed. We must not lose the momentum that has built up from the significant changes made last session. Instead, we will continue to work for water policy improvements so agriculture, fish, business, utilities, developers and local government can get the water they need.



IMPROVING TRANSPORTATION: KEEPING HIGHWAYS SAFE AND PEOPLE AND PRODUCTS MOVING

The Legislature will go back to the drawing board this session to try to solve the state's transportation needs. Negotiations on a funding plan broke down over the summer, leaving some critical projects throughout the state without funding.

The governor has dusted off the same plan rejected by lawmakers last year, which includes a 9-cent gas tax increase, a 12-cent increase on diesel, increased sales taxes on car purchases, increased weight fees on trucks and RVs, and a \$50 license registration fee.

Aside from the fact that lawmakers didn't like this plan last time it came before us, the governor has alienated many communities by threatening to pull funding for projects if their local lawmakers don't support his plan. This tactic disappointed lawmakers from both parties.

The governor's approach is divisive at a time when collaboration is needed. He should be looking to bring people together to solve this statewide issue. We remain hopeful bipartisan negotiations will produce a plan that will solve our serious transportation needs and earn the support of citizens throughout the state.

NEW BOUNDARIES APPROVED FOR LEGISLATIVE DISTRICTS

The state's redistricting commission has agreed on new boundaries for the state's 49 legislative districts. The borders are redrawn every ten years to reflect changes in population and to ensure equal representation throughout the state. The new proposed 15th District shifts slightly westward, taking in residents of Skamania County and southeast Clark County, but losing residents in Benton County to the neighboring 16th District.

Although the plan was approved just hours after the redistricting commission's legal deadline, lawmakers voted overwhelmingly to accept the new boundaries.

The new legislative map will be in effect for races on the 2002 election ballot.



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REPRESENTATIVES
BARB LISK AND
BRUCE CHANDLER
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

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